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AUTHOR Chambers, Thomas A.
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ABSTRACT

Teaching in a community college is unique because of the range of student goals, age levels, and backgrounds, which is greater than in most other institutions of higher education. Liberal arts instructors in the community colleges must be able to intelligently digest and rationally order the research of others, not conduct their own research projects. Reading, evaluating, and synthesizing research findings, as opposed to conducting one's own research, are unique skills. A program for preparing liberal arts instructors for two-year institutions must recognize the difference. This paper outlines a program for the preparation of teachers in academic fields at two-year colleges which should involve two years of full-time graduate study: one year to complete a master's degree in an academic field, and a second year for student teaching at a community college, graduate courses in education, and a systematic evaluation of research methods in the academic field. Some obstacles to the implementation of such a program and their solutions are also discussed. (JMF)

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ACADEMIC INSTRUCTION AT COMMUNITY COLLEGES:

A PROGRAM FOR TEACHER PREPARATION

by

THOMAS A. CHAMBERS
ASSISTANT PROFESSOR OF POLITICAL SCIENCE
RIVERSIDE CITY COLLEGE, RIVERSIDE, CALIFORNIA

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

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The American community (or junior) college is responsible for a growing share of higher education in this country. In 1974, there were more than 3.3 million students in degree and non-degree credit programs at two-year institutions in all fifty states; nearly one-third of these students were enrolled in the 107 schools of the huge California state community system. By numbers alone this nation's community colleges warrant the interest of all institutions involved with the preparation of teachers for higher education and concerned with the quality of instruction found in this important sector of citizen education.

Typically, community colleges serve three constituencies: academic transfer students working toward Bachelor's degrees, vocational interest students seeking specific occupational skills, and general interest students taking courses for personal satisfaction and with no specific degree or occupational goals. All three groups usually take some academic courses (liberal arts and sciences, having a theoretical focus) and it is the preparation of instructors for these students that should be of major concern to departments, divisions, and schools of Education and the liberal arts. To be sure, there are few instructors of vocational education who would not benefit from greater knowledge of the philosophy and organization of educational institutions or the most advanced methods of teaching their courses and serving their clients, but the failure to provide sufficient preparation for instructors of academic courses threatens the quality of

education of millions of students of academic subjects. The haphazard system currently in force for preparing community college instructors in academic areas is the subject of this paper.

Teaching in a community college is like no other teaching assignment. The range of student goals, age-levels, and backgrounds is much greater than in most other institutions of higher education. As a result, instruction must be geared to an incredibly varied clientele. In academic fields the knowledge imparted must serve to:

---provide foundation for further study in the field

---provide general interest material to students not planning further study in the field

---relate to the goals and interests of non-academic program students

---broaden the interests of general studies students

---attract students to the study of the liberal arts

---show vocational students the value of the liberal arts in a program of occupational preparation

Needless to say, an instructional program involving such a varied clientele requires special planning and execution. Too much emphasis on technical material in the field (as in the rote work of chemistry or the jargon of political science) might serve college transfer students to four-year institutions and no one else. Failure to provide enough scholarly background in a field may result in students who are ill-prepared to do upper-division college work in the liberal arts and students with an inaccurate perception of the challenge and satisfaction of doing acceptable

scholarly work. The impression of liberal arts fields may be indelibly damaged in the minds of general or vocational students, perhaps closing forever any interest or curiosity in the study of academic fields. The great opportunity of the community college academic program is that it has access to a wide cross-section of the community of students, rather than the educationally narrow group of 18-22-year-olds found at many four-year colleges and universities. Community colleges serve as the initial, and in many cases the exclusive, contact of men and women with scholarly study in the liberal arts. If it takes full advantage, with skill and direction, of this opportunity to serve it can successfully launch the career study of great scholars, raise the academic horizons of high school graduates, excite to learning adults who may have never considered academic learning to be of value, and provide the foundation for life-long liberal arts reading and contemplation. Ironically, it can do all of this at a fraction of the cost of comparable institutions that must fund elaborate research and non-academic student service needs.

With such prospects awaiting community college education it remains incredible that so little care has gone into the preparation of its academic instructors. To date, virtually all instructors in academic programs were prepared for teaching at the secondary level or for four-year college or university teaching. Of late the latter has most often been the case as the current market for community college instructors seems to favor students coming out of graduate level programs rather than high school teachers with

academic Master's degrees who are seeking to "move up." The major pool for new instructors is found in the same graduate schools preparing teachers and scholars for college and university teaching and research positions. Leaving aside the question of whether these departments are adequately preparing students to someday replace their mentors, they are certainly not currently preparing instructors for community college teaching positions. The craft approach of a junior scholar completing research successfully under the loose tutorship of a senior scholar does not insure competance in serving the varied constituency found in most community colleges. At best such graduate students have an opportunity to teach an introductory course in their fields, but the students in the freshman courses at graduate degree granting institutions only partly resemble the students in an equivalent course at the community college. More likely, graduate schools prepare their students through teaching assistantships that may involve very little formal teaching, instead revolving around the grading of papers or the leadership of small discussion or laboratory sections. While such duties may be valuable to both the school and its graduate students they do not provide the careful preparation (and screening) necessary to the production of instructors fully capable of meeting the challenges of teaching at a community college. As a result, students prepared for one teacher role (teacher and scholar at a school much like their graduate schools) may be dropped into another role because of the nature of the current teacher job market, or because they were unable to, or chose not to, complete

their doctoral programs in academic fields. It is hard to imagine a less fortuitous source of faculty to staff the academic divisions of America's community colleges.

At a community college, an instructor in the arts and sciences needs a firm knowledge of his field, a general acquaintance with other liberal arts fields, and the teaching ability necessary to creatively synthesize a massive amount of material into an instructional format that serves a wide variety of students. Classes vary greatly in size but tend to be large enough to demand lecture skills in most liberal arts courses. Course material should be organized to make the course's structure and intent very clear at the outset since surprisingly few students come to such courses with any clear idea as to the parameters of any academic fields. Furthermore, few students have the patience or motivation to wait around for weeks to discover what any given course is all about. Finally, the community college instructor in an academic field must often take responsibility for directing students in and out of course majors and programs with which the student is only vaguely familiar. The range of learning problems that some students have in the course of completing a semester's work requires a counseling function from most instructors that exceeds their teaching duties.

How can the graduate schools, including their departments, divisions, and schools of Education, assist in the preparation of instructors to serve these needs for competant liberal arts faculty at the community colleges? The first action would be for the [illegible]

liberal arts departments to recognize once and for all the importance of people trained to teach as opposed to those trained to do research. Certainly the functions are not mutually exclusive but they are also not identical. Increasing numbers of teachers holding advanced degrees are teaching at community colleges (much of the growth in college freshman populations during the last decade has occurred at the two-year institution level) and yet little cognizance is taken of their special teaching environments. Community college liberal arts instructors should be schooled in the range of research available in their disciplines (how to find it and how to read it intelligently) as well as the basic format and skills for doing scholarly investigations. Perhaps most importantly they should be able to distinquish adequate from inadequate research methodologies. But few community college instructors will spend the bulk of their professional lives doing any sort of major research. Their skills must be focused on synthesizing the research results of others into a form useful in the spheres of knowledge of college freshman and sophomores. In short, liberal arts instructors in the community colleges must be able to intelligently digest and rationally order the research of others, not conduct their own research projects. Reading, evaluating, and synthesizing research findings, as opposed to conducting one's own research, are unique skills. A program for preparing liberal arts instructors for two-year institutions will recognize the difference.

A decade ago, the State of California credentialed its community college instructors in much the same manner as it

certified its secondary teachers: after completion of a specified program of Education courses and a period of student teaching. Coupling community college instructors with high school teachers is as bad as linking them to university professors, but the notion of student teaching is probably valid for teachers at all levels. Any program of teacher training ought to provide field experience for novice teachers under the supervision of an experienced [illegible] instructor in schools. For the future liberal arts instructor in the community colleges this would mean an opportunity to develope and deliver lectures, write and grade examinations, counsel students with learning difficulties, and direct individual student projects in areas of special student concern. Such experience should be of at least one semester's duration and be organized and evaluated by the student in conjunction with his colleague at the community college, an advisor in his Master's degree program in an academic discipline, and the Education school at his university. Such a three person panel would be invaluable in preparing the student for the professional life of a community college instructor.

Most instructors in two-year institutions will not teach material beyond that acquired in a solid undergraduate program in their discipline. It may be argued, therefore, that preparation in the academic field beyond the Bachelor's degree is superfluous. Such a position, however, assumes that a teacher need stay only barely ahead of his/her students. Much upper-division undergraduate work is certainly "frosting on the cake" of the scholarly background of most community college instructors, but it is doubtful

that it is enough. Certainly college instructors at any level should have a broad and general acquaintance with the various sub-areas of their disciplines as well as some preparation in corollary fields. Political scientists need background in history, sociology, philosophy, and others. It is a poorly prepared chemist who is not conversant with the principles of physics and biology and who can not read intelligently the scholarly literature written for teachers in these fields. A Master's degree in the discipline to be taught is necessary and adequate preparation for community college instructors and is now often required by state credentialing agencies.

In addition to directed teaching in the community colleges, however, these Master's degree programs should include such academic training in the discipline as is cognizant of the course demands of two-year institutions. In the community colleges, political scientists will teach primarily American Government, historians will teach a great deal of United States History, and chemists and physicists will teach the same sort of general survey courses in their fields. The emphasis within an academic Master's degree program has great significance for the preparation of teachers in their fields: The more toward the general thrust and study of the academic area the better the candidate is prepared to teach the survey courses taught in the first two years of college study. Deans of Instruction and Department Chairmen are used to receiving applications for employment relating preparation in all sorts of esoteric sub-fields of a discipline but without evidence of

preparation for and interest in the survey courses appropriate to the lower-division curriculum offered at their institutions. Candidates interested in preparing for community college teaching will orient their graduate academic training toward the broad survey areas of their disciplines.

Added to the partnership of the community colleges (student teaching experience) and the academic departments (Master's degree in an academic field) should be the schools, divisions, and departments of Education at teacher training institutions. Besides assisting in the oversight of student teaching, Education schools should supplement the Master's program with courses in community college teaching methods, organization, and philosophy, as well as educational foundation courses emphasizing the role, scope, and significance of schools in American life in both historical and contemporary terms. As stated above, community college courses demand special skills of lecture, discussion leadership, laboratory work, and counseling unique to two-year institutions. Orientation to the institution and development of such skills should properly occur in Education courses during graduate training.

A course in the organization of the community college would emphasize the philosophy behind the "open door" admissions policy that results in a large mix of student ages and academic preparation, as well as the varied academic, vocational, and community service programs found on most campuses. Students who would become teachers in such institutions should be fully aware of their community service commitments and the varied backgrounds and

perspectives of both their teaching colleagues and the students in their classrooms. The "open door" admissions policy is alien to most four-year colleges (or at least they would like it to be); it would be helpful in avoiding culture shock if teachers coming out of graduate school had the opportunity to understand where it fits in the general scheme of recurring opportunities for personal growth through programs in higher education for all people deemed able to profit from the instruction.

Beyond such courses focusing specifically on the community college as an institution and as a teaching environment, future instructors should also have taken courses in educational foundations. Indeed, no person should be teaching anywhere without a background in the historical and contemporary functions of schools in American society. Schools are too important, culturally and politically, to be populated by teachers ignorant of how they developed and how they serve contemporary societal imperatives. Courses in the history of American education, comparative education, and the politics of education would all be appropriate to the preparation of community college instructors.

The program outlined above for the preparation of teachers in academic fields at two-year colleges should involve two years of full-time graduate study. The first year would be used to complete a Master's degree program in an academic field and the second year would involve student teaching at a community college, graduate level courses in Education (Organization and Philosophy of the Community College, Teaching Methods, History of American Education,

and perhaps a Foundations survey course), and a systematic evaluation of research methods in the appropriate academic field. Such a program would insure that both the potential instructor and the potential employing institution would be prepared for each other. Not so incidentally, most schools currently set teacher salaries by educational attainment and years of experience so that such a two year program would be fully compensated on the salary scales of virtually all community colleges.

There are two important obstacles to the implementation of this program: First, many students who plan careers in higher education are unfamiliar with or initially uninterested in community college teaching. Second, graduate schools in the liberal arts may be unwilling to loosen their grip on their graduate degree program students.

The first problem may already be declining in importance. As community college systems expand throughout the nation students will become more familiar with career teachers at two-year institutions, and some instructors report that increasing numbers of their students are coming to appreciate the appeal of such a choice. Still, the subjective evidence is that most graduate school students begin their careers with the intent of becoming university professors. The high attrition rate within doctoral programs in the liberal arts indicates that many students change their plans while in graduate school. Others may be "settling" for community college positions because of the unavailabilty of university jobs. The program outlined above permits one full year of academic studies

in a graduate department, centered around the core of the discipline, before the student need consider the community college alternative. It is suggested that most graduate students have enough knowledge, after one year, of the demands of graduate school and of the degree of their own interest in the narrowly focused study that accompanies doctoral programs to decide on their own future direction. The result would be an appropriate end to the zero-sum employment game played by far too many graduate departments in the liberal arts.

It is perhaps within the arts and sciences of the graduate schools that such a program of community college teacher preparation would meet the greatest opposition. Graduate students have remained a source of inexpensive teaching and research assistance for a long time and many departments might be jealous of any threat to this source of paper-graders or of teachers for small discussion or laboratory sections. Most likely, students spending their second year of graduate studies student teaching at a community college and taking courses in the Education school would be lost for such teaching assistant services. Many graduate students might very well welcome such an alternative and it would be interesting to find what percentage of graduate students remain in their departments and continue with their studies after they have determined that the Ph.D is either unlikely or undesirable in their career preparation.

It may be, of course, that one year is insufficient to decide whether academic training and research is a reasonable and desirable

goal. For such students community college teaching might be a way station from which Ph.D. studies could continue at a later date. It seems very likely that the graduate departments must relinquish their holds on graduate level academic students in order to improve the career prospects and choices of some of their students. Perhaps more first year students (Master's degree) would thereby be enticed into graduate level programs, improving the teaching responsibilities, if not the research capabilities, of university professors. In conjunction with the schools of Education, liberal arts departments would improve the marketability of some of their graduates and the flexibility of all of their programs.

Community colleges serve an extremely important sector of the consumers of higher education in America. Within this sector, at any given time, are more than two million adults who are largely unfamiliar with scholarly growth and study but who will be taking academic courses in the liberal arts. It behooves the academic community to be assured that their fields are given the best possible introduction to these students. Not until the preparation of community college liberal arts instructors assumes a position of special and unique consideration will academic practitioners be reasonably assured that this is the case.